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THEOPHANIA:

AN ENGLISH POLITICAL ROMANCE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Many tales and romances were published in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of which we have an inclusive knowledge since the publication of the very complete bibliography of Arundell Esdaile.¹ Some of these tales were translations from other languages, especially the French; others were purely imaginative, altho the product of imagination appears very dry; and others had some connection with history. It would be saying too much to declare that the historical tales had a plot, yet there appear occasionally climaxes or crises or *dénoûements* which are different from the usual form of a slender narrative interspersed with long stories recited by different persons of the drama. In a few cases, the history is used for a setting while the tale may run wild between occasional facts; in others, ancient kingdoms are mentioned without much regard for accurate statements. In still others, however, the form of a tale is used as a medium for satire, or for comment upon contemporary conditions. There are not many of the latter; the earliest is the translation of John Barclay's *Argenis*, 1625, and there are a few which follow, interesting from both the historical and the literary side.

One of these historical romances is *Theophania*, published in 1655, and covering about fifty years of English history in its supposed account of the Kingdom of Sicily. Very little seems to be known of this book, for none of the general accounts of English literature of the period mention it, nor do any of the historians

¹ *A List of English Tales and Prose Romances Printed before 1740*. By Arundell Esdaile. London, 1912. See *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXIX, 45 f.

who cover the period refer to it. There are at present in existence, according to my investigations, at least five copies,—in the British Museum; Chetham's Library, Manchester; City Library, Manchester; Library of Congress; and The Newberry Library, Chicago. Henry Kersley owned a copy in 1851, for he wrote to *Notes and Queries* to inquire further about the book; James Crossley owned a copy at the time, for he replied in 1852 concerning it. Kersley's copy may be one of those already mentioned (except the British Museum copy); Crossley's, which had certain manuscript notes, cannot be traced in any library, or in the sales catalogs of Crossley's books. Doubtless there are other copies extant, and it is to be hoped that Crossley's copy will be found.

The author of *Theophania* is anonymous,—“An English Person of Quality,”—but Crossley's copy had a manuscript note, “Sir William Sales.” According to this, the Library of Congress attributes the book to him, but no biographical list so far examined makes reference to such a man.

In the Newberry Library copy, a few manuscript notes appear in the margin. One of these identifies Theodora, Queen of Sicily, with Elizabeth of England. With this as a clue, and with two other slight intimations, I have come to conclude that the whole book as it stood was but a mask for a mildly partizan account of the early years of the Civil War in England; and that every name both of person and of place conceals a real character or a locality in the English history of the time. With this revelation of historical opinions and of literary problems, the deadly dull romance assumes a new character, and its deciphering becomes a real pleasure.

The story, in brief, is of several noble gentlemen who by chance find refuge from shipwreck, or from their enemies in civil war, at the house of Synesius, a courtly gentleman who lives on the coast of Sicily. These include, first, Demetrius, a comely prince of Achaia, who is doubtless William II of Orange. A marginal note on page 5 calls him “King ———,” while on page 41 it calls him “Prince of Ora——”; unfortunately the margins have been cut, so that in neither case is the annotation complete. The purpose of Demetrius is the pursuit of Mariana, daughter of Antiochus (Charles I) and sister of Alexandro (Prince Charles), altho historically the Prince of Orange and Mary were married in

1641, and Demetrius's sighs served only to heighten the story anachronously.

The second recipient of the hospitality of Synesius is Alexandro, who is no other than Prince Charles, in love with Theophania, for whom he also sighs frequently. His heartfelt affection for her, shown in the early pages and in one or two references later, offers the only occasions for mentioning the character that gives the title to the book. Probably she was the French princess with whom negotiations for marriage with Charles were carried on for a while. Charles himself is represented as a god-like being, whom everyone recognizes immediately by his superb form and divine grace.

Cenodoxius is the third chief guest, and he is recognized as the Earl of Essex, not only from his story but also from the marginal note of "Erl of Es——."

These three men have to pass the time away somehow at the house of Synesius, especially while Demetrius is recovering from sickness brought on by exposure; the object is accomplished by having the stories of the chief characters told. Prince Charles is too unfortunate and too sacred to have a story; so the first tale is that of Demetrius and Mariana, told by Lysander, the companion of Demetrius, with the latter's permission while he is still in bed under a physician's care. The story is rather simple. Demetrius being a remarkable youth who has won fame as a young soldier for the Peloponnesians (Dutch) is sent on an expedition against the Emperor of Greece (Greece is probably Spain, altho sometimes the description seems to fit the German Empire as well or better). On this expedition Demetrius penetrates with ease to Constantinople, the capital, but spares it because of the noble demeanor of the Empress, and because of the love at sight he conceives for the princess Mariana (the English Mary), who has been betrothed to a Grecian prince and is still in Greece mourning the death of Leonidas, her betrothed. Demetrius returns home with great plaudits, but when his parents suggest a marriage with the Queen of Armenia(?) to support the position of the Orange family, he leaves home; he falls into a misunderstanding with Mariana with whom he has never spoken; but he manages to impress his devotion upon her, and it is upon his way to England in pursuit of her that he is shipwrecked, as told at the opening of the romance.

Fortunately for the book, about the time that Lysander finishes Cenodoxius appears, and altho he is looked on with suspicion because he led the Parliamentary forces against the king, he has a chance to tell his story and that of his father Heraclius, as justification for his actions. This story of the Earls of Essex starts with the reign of Elizabeth and deals rather harshly with her, attributing the main reasons for England's present unfortunate condition to her. The unhappy fate of the older Essex is described in detail, and the equally unhappy circumstances of the early life of the younger Essex are used to show why he was willing to be a leader in the war against Charles I, altho not in entire sympathy with the cause he was leading. In the course of his story he gives an account of several battles of the Civil War. His story ends with his leaving the army and escaping by chance to the house of Synesius, where he recognizes Prince Charles; without being at all humble, he seeks accommodation with Charles and the royalists.

This latter proposition forms the wedge to admit a discourse by Synesius on the English Constitution, which is directed to the end of urging Charles to a reconciliation with Essex. This is about to be accomplished when a captive is brought in from the Royal army, a leader of ability and prowess. He too recognizes Prince Charles and tells the story of Clorimantes (himself) and Perrotus, two noble soldiers, both of whom had fallen in love with another paragon of womanliness, Monelia. Perrotus is killed, Monelia therefore kills herself, and Clorimantes was on the way to find those responsible for the death of Perrotus, when he was brought in a captive. The story of Monelia ends thus; but as there was in it some reference to Philocles (Prince Rupert), Cenodoxius (Essex) upon request gave Prince Charles a full account of the passage concerning Philocles, which Clorimantes had touched on in his discourse; then, "it being already far advanced in the night, left him to his privacy. Finis."

Certainly an unsatisfactory ending from the point of view of romance, for Demetrius has not as yet any hope of Mariana, altho Alexandro (Charles) has promised a good word for him; Cenodoxius is a leader fled from his own party and not received by the others; Clorimantes seeks vengeance, which he seems unlikely to accomplish. As to the historical features, also, there is

no conclusion,—Prince Charles is trying to make up his mind what to do, and Cromwell is hovering in the background. Such are the separate stories that are woven into the tale, and such is the complete tale of *Theophania*.

Altogether no less than one hundred and eight names of persons appear, some mentioned only once or twice, and some having very insignificant parts, yet most of them introduced with a certain degree of carefulness, suggesting that they are counterparts of real persons. Only occasionally does it seem that the character is fictitious, in order to fill out the story. In many cases the array of names of minor characters serves to deaden what interest there is in the tale, unless one is reading with a detective sense for identification. In a very few cases there is some similarity, or a reason, in the choice of names,—as, Mariana for Mary, or Evaldus, a transposition for Laud; but for the most part the names are without significance, except that the author tries to make them in keeping with the country they come from.

Similarly, there are twenty-seven places named, and there is an attempt to keep them in some sort of geographical relation. Sicily is England; Palermo, the capital, is London. The Grecian Empire is Spain; the Peloponnesus, which revolts, is the United Provinces; Sparta is the capital. Cyprus is Scotland; and Sardinia, Ireland, with its capital, Oristagnum (= Dublin, ‘dark pool’?). Thessaly seems to be the Palatinate of the Rhine. In the account of the Civil War, the ingenuity of the author wanes somewhat,—Essex marches against Cornavii (Cornwall?); the King’s standard is unfurled at Mottingham (Nottingham); the King marches into Coritani(?); Tropanio was Edgehill. Nicosia stands for Oxford, and Coves (Coves?) is where Essex tried to intercept the king. Galia is France.

While there is an attempt to keep these names in their proper places, there are some confusions or complete fictions. Philocles, for instance, combines characteristics of both Frederick V, the Winter King of Bohemia, and his son, Prince Rupert, who fought with Charles I. Demetrius, also, combines the persons of Maurice of Nassau, the wonder in fighting, and William II, who marries Mary; or else Polidor, his father, combines the characters of William I, and of Maurice. Also at times there seems to be confusion between Spain and the Holy Roman Empire as to which is meant by “Greece”; and between the German Emperor and

the Pope, as to the counterpart of "Roman Emperor." Elizabeth is recorded as doing some of the acts of Henry VIII, and the chronology of the older Essex is false; but for the most part the historical and geographical relations are kept clear.

The political opinions of the "English Person of Quality," who wrote the book, center about four topics. First is the person of Charles, already referred to. He is spoken of (p. 23) as a "knight that seemed to perform more than humane actions," of "admirable valour," of "majestick beauty," the "perfection of all his sex," of "such a royal meine that both knees and hearts were ready to bow at his devotion." As the person of the prince indicated divinity, Demetrius calls him "Divine creature," and Synesius says "my Genius gives me an assurance that you have divinity about your person," and again (page 196), "a Prince who is deputed by Heaven, to exercise a Kingly power upon earth, ought in this to imitate the Supreme Deity." From these extracts, it is easy to understand the attitude of the "English Person of Quality" towards the monarchy and the person of the royal heir.

As to Elizabeth, the main source for opinions is the story of Cenodoxius, which not only relates facts, but attributes motives, altho it occasionally gives Elizabeth credit or discredit for more than she did. It tells how she secured the crown, and "thro a seeming popularity brought the people into a slavish obedience." Her character was "cruel and ambitious," but "nevertheless surpassing even all her sex in the art of dissembling, she so veiled it with a mark of affability" that even her violent proceedings, her frequent oppressions, her violation of the laws, and her profound dissimulations, were so cloaked that she won the hearts of the people and of the nobles. Her marriage schemes were political until England's position was established, then she admitted "divers Favourites to more than ordinary familiarity, as often as her fancie pleased, [and] disgraced some and advanced others, to the same hopes." This brings us to the beginning of the regard she showed Essex; also to the relations with Rome, which supported "Aurelia, Queen of Cyprus" (Mary, Queen of Scots) in her claim to the throne; and the attempt of Castorex (Ridolfi) to kill Elizabeth, from which he was prevented by Essex (error). This event is given as the cause of the hostility to Rome, and all the arguments and acts against Rome follow immediately. The priests were driven out, and the temples destroyed, while the people

approved. Elizabeth said (page 115), "We must no longer suffer these idle superstitions to reign among us," and "she assumed to herself and her successors the sacred office of the High Priesthood." "I have not altered," she said, "anything of the ancient forms"; but she declared she was forced to oppose Rome because it would not give up its support of "Aurelia."

The third topic of political interest discussed is what Synesius calls the "English Constitution,"—really a discussion of English policy, both domestic and foreign, compared with the policies of other nations. Synesius rather idealizes other countries, while depreciating the English, "who confident of their own strength and the natural defence of the sea, despising all rules and contemning their wisdom and virtue, have by degrees imbraced the imperfections and vices of all other nations, the pride of the Grecians, the luxury of the Romans, the intemperance of the Peloponnesians, the levity of the Sicilians² and in conclusion whatever may render them contemptible or contribute to their own ruin." England lost the gains of the early French wars, had internal contests between king and nobles, and the Wars of the Roses between two princely houses; "but not to be tedious," Synesius says, "the publick affairs have been still swayed by the interests or inclinations of particular persons," of whom Somerset neglected the interests of England for Scotland; Buckingham was jealous of all men except the most submissive; Stafford laid new foundations; and Laud built on quicksands. "Thus what one built, another presently destroyed," and so the country, being subordinated to personal interests, naturally became the prey of factions and discontents.

Finally, on the political side, arises the question of what to do in the crisis of affairs in 1645. The kingly dignity and power has been brought low. Essex has left the Parliamentary forces, but Coroastus (Cromwell) is now leading them. Prince Charles, in the story, intimates a desire to come to terms with Cromwell, and Synesius acknowledges that that would be well, for Cromwell is frank, and his followers are of more integrity than the Scotch or the party of Essex. But as Cromwell is firm in his purpose and has a strong army, he probably would not abandon his chances of success, especially as he holds London with all its wealth. The

² He means the French, altho he twice calls them Sicilians.

question then is, where shall the Royalists get aid? Not from Spain, for she has suffered "so many pointed affronts"; not from France, or any foreign power. The obvious thing is, therefore, a reconciliation with Essex and his party. "They can be trusted, for they know that if you receive them not into favor, they are absolutely ruined." Having received this advice from Synesius, Prince Charles admits its worth, and says, "I confess myself vanquished, and furnished with these reasons shall easily induce the King to imbrace your advice."

These are the subjects of the political discussion. They are interesting in themselves, but there are two other important points. These are the question of the date of the book, and that of the Essex-Elizabeth ring-story.

The date of *Theophania* on all copies with a title-page is 1655, but the publisher in his preface vaguely suggests the possibility of its having been written earlier. The tone and the facts suggest an earlier date. In the first place, King Antiochus (Charles I) is mentioned several times as being alive. For instance, Prince Charles says (page 28), "have not the sufferings of my royal parents satisfied your wrath? Will you still persecute them?" And again, "Heap affliction upon my parents, deprive them of their Empire, and me of my succession." On page 99 Synesius says, "But you will never be able to divert that torrent of confusion which threatens the total subversion of this flourishing monarchy." It is evident then that the book was written while the King was still alive, therefore, before January, 1649.

The fact that the Civil War is called the "Seven Years War" might incline one to the opinion that 1649, seven years from the outbreak in 1642, was meant; but if the troubles of England are dated from the first outbreak in Scotland in 1638, then the date is thrown back to 1645. This agrees with the opinion given of Cromwell, for he is spoken of as rising (with his "new acquired greatness" after Essex's departure); and described in a friendly manner (page 187), for Prince Charles says,—he "cannot be truly said to rebel against the King"; "the frankness of his proceedings is so generous"; "I would rather to enjoy a divided Empire with him than be fully restored by the assistance of Cenodoxius." This, unless a hoax, throws new light on the early attitude of the Royalists towards Cromwell, and also serves to confirm the opinion

of the earlier date on the book. Finally, and most convincing, is the fact that there would have been no point to a large part of the book had not Essex been still living (he died in September, 1646); and had he not left the Parliamentary army, which he did in September, 1645. It can be asserted with reasonable confidence that the book was written towards the end of 1645. Whether it was examined then by the "respectable gentlemen," whom the publisher speaks of in his preface, or not, is unknown. Certainly it would have been very difficult for anyone, because of subsequent events, to write in the spirit of this book, for the attitude towards Cromwell and the facts themselves would all have changed.

If written in 1645, why was it not published till 1655? Was it a political pamphlet intended to strengthen the Royalist cause, which rapid changes or uncertainty of events made difficult or impossible of publication in 1645? Was it actually published in 1645, and was there another edition in 1655? Why was it published in 1655 at all, unless to discredit the Commonwealth, and if so, why was the pleasing characterization of Cromwell retained? These are questions which arise out of the book and make it of great interest.

The remaining point of interest is the ring-story. This comes in the life-tale of Heraclius, the first Earl of Essex, told by Cenodoxius, his son. Elizabeth gives the older Essex a ring, which he is to send to her whenever he is in trouble and she will save him, even his life (p. 120). After Essex has been to Ireland and comes back to England disgraced, he raises a small body of men, as is well known, to rescue Elizabeth from her advisers. He is charged with treason and condemned to death. He sends the ring (pp. 148-50) to Elizabeth by the Countess of Nottingham, who out of jealousy fails to deliver it, and Essex is executed. But remorse overcomes the Countess and on her deathbed, shortly afterwards, she sends for Elizabeth and tells her. Elizabeth, who had a real affection for Essex, is overcome by grief, and dies of a broken heart.

The ring-story has been worked out by Ranke (*History of England*, Oxford translation, I, 352-3) and by Brewer (*Quarterly Review*, 1876, I, 23; see *D. N. B.*, Robert Devereux). The first appearance of the story in its generally accepted form was about 1650, in the *History of the Most Renowned Queen Elizabeth and her Great Favourite, the Earl of Essex. In Two Parts. A Romance.*

It was repeatedly re-issued (fifteen editions to 1740), and John Banks dramatized it in *The Unhappy Favourite*. The important point is that if *Theophania* was written in 1645 as seems likely, then the ring story there was the earliest account. Whether the author of the above romance saw the manuscript of *Theophania* or knew its author, or whether the author of both pieces was the same, or whether the romance was published earlier, is still undetermined. It seems unlikely, however, that two different authors should have developed the same story independently.

This brings us to another point on which no final judgment can be rendered at present, and that is the possibility that Clarendon was the author of *Theophania*.³ Clarendon says (*Life*, II, 69) that about this time (1643-6) he was writing a good deal of fugitive material including parodies. Very little of this has been identified as his. He began his *History* in 1646. Several passages read like similar passages in *Theophania* (thus, p. 200, the account of Armandus stirring up rebellion in Scotland; cf. *History*, Bk. IX, p. 748, Richelieu). Moreover, the political opinions with some exceptions (which are placed, however, in the mouths of different characters) agree with Clarendon's general position. In 1655, he was on the continent in exile and there was no reason why, if Thomas Heath, the publisher, wanted to publish a work by "An English Person of Quality" he should not do so. On the other hand, in "The Difference and Disparity between George Duke of Buckingham and Robert Earl of Essex" (*Reliquiae Wottonianae*, p. 184), Clarendon speaks more favorably of Elizabeth and says, "I am nothing satisfied with that loose report which hath crept into our discourse about the ring."

In conclusion then, this romance, which at first sight seemed so dull, is interesting enough and abounds in problems. It appears to be clear that it was written ten years before it was published, and that it contains the first account of the ring. There are some resemblances to Clarendon, tho it is far from being proved that he was the author.

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³ Dr. T. C. Pease, of the University of Illinois, whose doctor's dissertation at the University of Chicago was on "The Levellers," has made this suggestion.